

Guns of the Gods

by **TALBOT MUNDY**
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Illustrated by Robert E. Johnston
A STORY OF INDIA, TREASURE, ROMANCE AND MYSTERY

PEOPLE AND THINGS IN THE STORY.

THE TREASURE OF SIALPORA, fabulous wealth gathered by generations of maharajahs, is sought by three persons. The first is YASMINI, daughter of the last maharajah and a Russian princess. To her, instead of bequeathing the secret of its hiding place, he left only a riddle for a clue.

GUNGADHURA, a distant cousin of Yasmini, is placed on the throne in her father's place by the British authorities, who hold that a woman could not successfully rule the territory. He employs spies of all kinds to watch Yasmini, believing that she has knowledge of its whereabouts. Though he is a dissolute, unscrupulous man, he was chosen over

UTIRUPA SINGH, another distant cousin.

DICK BLAINE, an American mining engineer, is hired by Gungadhura to search for gold in the vicinity of Sialpora.

THERESA BLAINE, his wife, strikes up a friendship with Yasmini. The latter enlists the services of

TOM TRIPE, the maharajah's English drill master, and his dog Trotters on her side of the intrigue.

SIR RONALD SAMSON, the English Commissioner, is the third anxious to find the treasure, on the Government's account, holding that Gungadhura might cause trouble should he find it and mistaking Yasmini's impetuous ways if she should be the lucky one. Fearing to eat lest Gungadhura poison her, and planning to escape, Yasmini begs Tess to come to her own palace (where she is a prisoner). Tess comes with Dick, who stays with Tom Tripe while she joins Yasmini.

While Yasmini and Tess plot the former's escape, Dick and Tom Tripe waiting some distance away in a shed, Gungadhura arrives with three eunuchs and demands admittance. As he shows his face at the gate Yasmini strikes at him with her knife and he suffers an ugly wound in the face. He is forcing the gate when Akbar, an elephant, maddened by rum, chases Tripe's dog Trotters to the gate, frightening Gungadhura and his aids away. Yasmini opens the gate to admit the terrified dog.

The diversion created by the drunken elephant allows the women to escape from the palace with Dick and Tom Tripe. Yasmini persuades Tess to go with her on a secret mission to a place some distance.

MUKHUM DASS, the money lender, steals the silver tube hidden in the Blaine's cellar and soon after is found murdered. Meanwhile, Yasmini and Tess go forth to take part in the ceremony for which the former left her palace.

The commissioner and the other officials decide Gungadhura should and it is suggested that Prince Utrupa be appointed to succeed him. The officials are not aware that in accordance with the old custom of the country Yasmini has chosen him for her husband and has already named him Maharajah. Dick is directed by Gungadhura to cease his mining operations and begin a search for the treasure. The Maharajah gives Dick a map from the silver tube which Mukhum had stolen.

"THE Princess Yasmini Omanoff Singh."

"Your Highness."

"Word has reached me frequently of late of pressure brought to bear on you to disclose a secret you possess. Let me assure you that my official protection from all illegal restraint and improper treatment is at your service. Further, that in case your secret is such as concerns vitally the political relations, present or future, of Sialpora, the proper person to whom to confide it is myself. Should you see your way to take that only safe course, you may rest assured that your own interests will be cared for in every way possible."

"I have the honor to be, 'Your Highness' obedient servant."

"Roland Samson, K. C. S. I."

"That looks fair enough," said Tess when Yasmini had read the note to her. "I dislike Samson for reasons of my own, but—"

"Hah!" laughed Yasmini. "He makes love to you! Is it not so? What a jest for the gods if I should make him marry me! I could I could make of Samson a power in India! But the man would weary me with his conceit."

By courtesy, the commissioner received a reply. It was deuced curt, it seemed to him, and veiled a sort of suggested laughter.

"The Princess Yasmini Omanoff Singh," it ran, "hastens to return thanks for Sir Roland Samson's kind letter. She is not, however, afraid of imprisonment or of undue pressure; and as for her secret, that is as safe as long as the river runs through the State of Sialpora."

Not a word more. He frowned at the letter, and read and reread it, smiling at the end and looking up the paper to the light, so that Sir Roland very nearly had a chance to read it through the knothole in the door.

The last phrase was the puzzle. It read at first like a boast. But he reflected on it. As an Orientalist of admitted distinction he had long ago concluded that hyperbole in the East is always based on some fact hidden in the user's mind, often without the user's knowledge. He rang the desk bell for Sir Roland.

"Is not the map of the province?"

"It was exactly as he thought as he studied the map without that little puzzle and the grounds, the State of Sialpora, would be founded exactly by the river."

Take away the so-called River Palace with the broad river surrounding it, and the river would no longer run through the State of Sialpora.

That would be the end, then, of the safety of the secret. There was food for reflection there.

What if the famous treasure of Sialpora were buried somewhere in the grounds of the River Palace? Somewhere, for instance, among those old walls and towers?

Caravan traveled in company with those of the Rajput's swarming for the polo tournament. Utrupa was among the travellers.

Yasmini saw her Prince every night, she apparently as much a man as he in turban and the comfortable Rajput costume—shorter by a head, but as straight-shouldered and as agile. Tess used to watch them under the trees, ready to give the alarm in case of interruption.

On the third day, nearing Sialpora toward evening, they filed past two batteries of Royal Horse Artillery, drawn up on a level plain, beside the road to let them by—an act of courtesy not unconnected with its own reward. It is never a bad plan to let the possibly rebellious take a long look at the engines of enforcement.

"Ah!" laughed Yasmini, up in a howdah beside Tess on the elephant, "the guns of the gods! I know the gods were helping us!"

"Look like English guns to me," Tess answered.

"So think the English, too. So think Samson, who sent for them. So, too, perhaps Gungadhura will think when he knows the guns are coming! But I know better. I never promise the gods too much, but let them make me promises, and look on while they perform them. I tell you, those are the guns of the gods!"

Samson, getting ready to "request" Gungadhura's abdication, had drawn up a contract by which Utrupa would accept the property on which the English fort stood within his territory to be in exchange for his property to be, the River Palace. It would be an advantage to both parties, from an administrative standpoint, Sir Roland was ready to point out to the new Maharajah.

Samson went by forced marches to tell the High Commissioner of the plan.

"It isn't a good bargain," said the latter. "The right to give us more than that in the circumstances."

"It's a supremely magnificent bargain!" retorted Samson. "After all the best financial bargain this province ever had the chance of!"

"How do you mean?"

"Samson whispered."

"The treasure of Sialpora is buried in the River Palace grounds! Millions! Think of it—Millions! Lakhs and crores!"

The High Commissioner whistled.

"That 'ud mean something to the province, wouldn't it! It would be difficult in a case like this to err on the side of silence, Samson. Who'll have to be told?"

"Nobody but Col. de Wing. I'll have to ask him for maps to guard the River Palace grounds. There's an American digging in the grounds by contract with Gungadhura. He'll have to be stopped, and I'll have to make some sort of explanation."

"Better point out to Utrupa that contracts with foreigners aren't regarded cordially."

"There is no reason why Utrupa should recognize the contract between Gungadhura and the American. It was a private contract—no official sanction," said Samson.

Samson continued to reach Sialpora on the morning before the day set for the polo tournament. He barely allowed himself time to shave before going to see Dick Blaine.

"You're wasting time and money, Blaine," he said. "I've come to tell you so."

"New—that's good of you."

"You must wait. Gungadhura is not worth the paper it's written on."

"How so?"

"He will not be Maharajah after noon to-day?"

"You don't mean it?"

"That information is confidential, but the news will be out by to-morrow. The British Administration is not to take any action until the end of the year."

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"IF I WERE A MAN—SHE WAITED, BUT HE GAVE NO SIGN MANHOOD."

which the River Palace stands.

"Now we've all admired your ability to make men work. But they're all a new Maharajah in a day or two, and, strictly between you and me, as one friend to another, there'll be a very slight chance indeed of your getting a contract from the incoming man to carry on your mining in the hills. I'd like to save you trouble and expense."

"Real good of you."

"Er—found anything down there?" Samson nodded over his shoulder toward the tunnel mouth.

"Not yet."

"Any signs of anything?"

"Not yet."

Samson took up another matter.

"By the way, they've arrested your butler, Chamu and the murderer of Mukhum Dass, all hiding together near a railway station. The murderer has been executed, as you Americans say. They often do when they're caught. He has told you who put him up to it."

"Guess I'll give you this, then. It's the map out of the silver tube that Mukhum Dass burgled from my cellar. Gungadhura gave it to me with instructions to dig here. You'll love there's blood on it."

"Too bad, Blaine!" said the Commissioner. "So you even had a map of the treasure, eh? Another day or two and you'd have forestalled me! I suppose you'd a contract with Gungadhura for a share of it?"

In Gungadhura's presence Samson went quickly to the point.

"It is known who murdered Mukhum Dass. The assassin has been caught and has confessed."

Gungadhura's eyes glared like an animal's.

"I have here"—Samson reached in his pocket—"a certain piece of parchment—a map in fact—that was stolen from the body of Mukhum Dass. Per-

haps Your Highness will recognize it. Look!"

Gungadhura looked and started like a man stung.

"If I abdicate?"—he asked.

"That would be sufficient. The assassin would then be allowed to plead guilty to another charge there is against him, and the matter would be dropped."

"I abdicate!"

"On behalf of His Majesty's Government I accept the abdication. Sign this, please."

Samson laid a formal written act of abdication on the table by the throne. Gungadhura signed it. Samson took it back and folded it away.

"But my son!"

"In case of abdication by a reigning Prince, or deposition of a reigning Prince," said Samson, "the Government of India reserves the right to appoint his successor."

Inside his hall Gungadhura sat alone for just so long as it took the sound of the closing door to die away. Then another door close behind the throne chair opened, and Patial, his favorite dancing girl, entered. She looked at him with pity on her face, and curiosity.

"That American said you," she said. "He told you, and the map and the treasure to the English!"

"I know it! I know it!"

"If I were a man!"

She waited, but he gave no sign of manhood.

"If I were a man I know what I would do!"

"Peace, Patial! I am a ruined man. They are doing me over. I feel it in my bones. I have none to send."

"Send! It is only Maharajahs who must send. Men do their own work! I know what I would do to an American or any other man who sold me!"

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The conclusion of this exciting romantic story comes to-morrow.

GIVE YOURSELF THE HAPPIEST CHRISTMAS OF YOUR LIFE

Make some poor child happy

Read

THE RICH LITTLE POOR BOY

by Eleanor Gates

and Join

The Rich Little Poor Boys' Christmas Club

No Dues Save the Will to Make Some Child Happier.

Membership Pledge and Story in

The Evening World

Monday, December 11.

Prominent Society Girls Who Will Assist At Benefit for Manhattanville Nursery



Society girls have promised to assist in making the benefit performance of Polisty's "Tear Fyodor Ivanovich" to be given at the Moscow Art Theatre, a success. The special performance will be given by the Junior Auxiliary of the Manhattanville Nursery Association of which Miss Margaret Hennessy is chairman. Edythe McCoon and Mrs. William J. Warburton will distribute programs.

Jolly, Round, Cheery Santa Claus Was Made So by a New York Poet Just 100 Years Ago This Month.

Before Clement Clarke Moore Wrote Famous Verses That Endured Saint to All Children, St. Nicholas Was Pictured as Gaunt Personage Riding a Horse.

By Ruth Snyder.

"Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse; The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there."

One hundred years ago, this very month and year, the above lines were written. Every child from then on until now has heard the famous lines.

But who is this St. Nicholas who inspired the poem? Who is the Santa Claus, the American St. Nicholas, we all love and look for around Christmas time? Where was he born? And when? And why?

Clement Clarke Moore, who wrote the above lines in his poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," was born in New York in 1797. In a section where many little boys and girls, descendants of the old Dutch settlers in New York, lived. It was from one of his Dutch neighbors that little Clement heard the legend of St. Nicholas—or Santa Claus—as the little Dutch children grew to call him. Then he grew older and had children of his own. On the evening of Dec. 23, 1822, he wrote "Twas the Night Before Christmas"—not to be published—but for the amusement of his own little boys and girls.

But all the boys and girls in the country wanted to hear about Santa Claus. They wanted to know how he looked and what he did on Christmas eve. So the poem went all over the world.

To-day the kiddies in America all picture Santa Claus as Clement Clarke Moore described him.

"What to my wandering eyes should appear But a miniature sleigh and eight reindeer, With a little old driver so heavily and quick, I knew in a moment it must be Saint Nick."

Down the chimney Saint Nicholas came with a bound, He was dressed all in furs from his head to his foot, And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot. His eyes—how they twinkled! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up in a bow, And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow. The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, And the smoke it exhaled his head like a wreath; He had a broad face and a little round belly That shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly. He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, And I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself."

And that's how Santa Claus looks to most of us—fat, round, cheerful—and riding his reindeer. But it has been only since he has been in America that Santa Claus has been fat and cheerful and riding his eight tiny reindeer.

Originally he came from Asia Minor. Then he was tall and thin and rode a gray horse or a white ass.

It seems that in the town of Patara, in Asia Minor, there lived a nobleman who was so poor that he was unable to furnish his daughters with suitable marriage portions. He was on the point of abandoning them when St. Nicholas, a patron saint, heard of his intention. Going secretly to the house of the nobleman one night he threw a purse of gold in an open window. This was given to the eldest daughter, her dowry. The second night a second purse was left. And on the third night a third purse for the

cents slain at Bethlehem by the order of Herod.

"On the eve of his festival day," writes an authority, "St. Nicholas makes his tour, visiting palace and cottage. Frequently, in the early evening, he makes a preliminary visit in his bishop's robes, with pastoral staff and mitre, at each house making inquiries concerning the conduct of the children, giving appropriate praise or warning and promising on the following morning to give substantial reward. When he is gone, the children place receptacles for the gifts which St. Nicholas is expected to let down the chimneys. The receptacles vary in different places. Sometimes shoes, plates, baskets. St. Nicholas's steed, variously conceived as a gray horse or a white ass, is not forgotten. For him the children put hay and water or carrot or potato peeling or a piece of bread in the manger. In the morning the children find the food gone from their shoes and in their place sweets and playthings."

Later St. Nicholas was found in Germany as a tall, thin fellow wearing a peaked hat, his deep pockets brimming full of nutmeg plums for the children.

When he came to American children—just how no one knows—he grew fat and rosy and seemed to like it so much that he has stayed on from year to year, growing fatter and rosier as the country grew. Who knows but what this year he will come riding up to the house in a big automobile instead of in a sleigh drawn by the eight tiny reindeer?

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